

CALL TO ORDER	<p>The one-hundred thirty-fifth meeting of the Water and Wastewater Operator's Advisory Council was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Bob Cottom, Dillon, Council Chairperson. Other Council members present included: Carol Reifschneider, Ph.D., MSU-Northern, Council Vice Chair; Joanne "Joni" Hall Emrick, Kalispell; Roger Thomas, Billings; Leland Leivo, Bigfork; Steve Ruhd, Conrad; and Jim Melstad, DEQ Public Water Supply Section.</p> <p>Department personnel attending all or portions of the meeting were Jenny Chambers, Certification Officer; Reta Therriault, Certification Technician; Ashley Finnegan, Certification Technician; Ruby Miller, Reimbursement Grant Accountant Technician; John Camden, Field Services Program Manager; Bill Bahr, wastewater environmental specialist; Eric Minneti, water specialist. Scott Anderson, Anderson-Montgomery Consulting Engineers also attended.</p>
MINUTES APPROVED	<p>The minutes from the previously held meeting on May 16, 2002 were unanimously approved following a motion by Steve and a second by Lee.</p>
ELECTION OF OFFICERS	<p>Bob announced it was time for a new election and asked for nominations. Steve nominated Carol to be new chairperson and Joni seconded the motion. Carol was unanimously elected. Steve nominated Joni to be the new vice chair and Lee seconded the motion. Joni was unanimously elected. Jim and the council members thanked Bob for his term serving as chairperson for the council. Bob turned the meeting over to Carol.</p>
STAFF CHANGES	<p>Jim introduced Ruby Miller and Jenny Chambers to the council. Ruby was hired in April 2002 to fill the Operator Expense Reimbursement accountant position. Jenny Chambers was hired in October 2002 to fill the Water and Wastewater Operator Certification Program Manager position.</p>
COUNCIL MEMBERS STATUS REPORT	<p>Jim announced that Roger Thomas was reappointed to the council. His current term will end October 16, 2008.</p>
EXAM REPORT	<p>Reta reported on the office exams administered since the May Council meeting, the June Summer School in Miles City, and the September 27, 2002 Fall School in Bozeman. She provided the council copies of summary sheets for all the new Association of Boards of Certification (ABC) administered exams for one year. The summary sheets indicate the type of exam taken, the number</p>

of individuals taking the exam, the range of grade received, and the percentage rate for passing. Joni questioned what the pass/fail rate was for the new wastewater exams compared to the previously administered exams. Reta stated that there was a steady improvement for a pass rate for the new wastewater exams for the level 3 and 4. The level 1 and 2 had a slight decrease in pass rate, but the operator certification program was not concerned with this decline. Reta said that the tests are harder and that potential operators will have to study. During the September 27, 2002 (Fall Water School) exam, the pass rate was approximately 73%. Overall, the council was pleased with the results. Bill Bahr informed the council that the review of wastewater exams was coming to an end. He stated that there were a few questions that will be removed and DEQ will request new questions from the ABC. The new questions will then be reviewed to determine their effectiveness and to ensure that the topics are covered in our reference documents indicated on our study guides. Bill stated that this work can be done internally and that the Anderson-Montgomery contract was complete as written. Scott Anderson was present to inform the council on the contract status. Scott reiterated what Bill stated and discussed his work in completing the revised Lagoon Manual. The Lagoon Manual is now titled the Basic Wastewater Treatment Manual and is an effective resource for all wastewater certification levels. The Basic Wastewater Treatment Manual includes Montana specific regulation information that is needed for the current wastewater exams.

Roger asked if the reference materials, specifically the California State University manuals produced by Dr. Kenneth Kerri, are sufficient and comparable to the Wastewater Operators Guide to Preparing for Certification Examination. The Wastewater Operators Guide to Preparing for Certification Examination was produced by Water Environmental Federation (WEF) in collaboration with ABC. This guide is designed to help operators prepare more effectively for certification exams and is consistent with the ABC's need-to-know matrix. Bill thought that the documents would be comparable and that the California State University manuals would still be an adequate resource. Jim suggested that the Operator Certification Program purchase a copy of the WEF/ABC guide to review and determine the need for another reference document. A copy will be purchased by the Operator Certification Program and will be reviewed. This will be discussed further at the next Advisory Council meeting.

Roger questioned if the department was going to have a collection system classification for wastewater operators similar to the current distribution certification. Jim stated that this issue was discussed in the past and the department is willing to take on the task. However, the request should come from the regulated community and the support is needed from the systems. This would be a challenging and worthwhile process that would include modifying new rules, developing study guide material, and exams.

WATER SCHOOL REPORT

The Fall Water School was in Bozeman on September 23 through 26 with the exam on the September 27. John Camden reported that the school went well and that there were 168 participants. John stated the participant level was down a little, but nothing to be concerned with. John stated that the Spring Water School will be held in both Kalispell and Billings. The Spring Water School is scheduled for April 2 through 4 with the exam administered on the April 5.

REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM UPDATE

Ruby informed the council that she gave a short presentation at the Fall Water School and is planning on doing the same thing at the Spring Water School. She passed out a brochure that Jenny Chambers produced. The brochure will be an effective tool in promoting the program. It will be sent out in mailings and passed out at training seminars, conferences, and at the water schools. Ruby explained that the Operator Reimbursement database is not yet tied to the Oracle Operator Certification Program database. She anticipates that this will be completed shortly and in the meantime is tracking the allocated money in an Excel spreadsheet. Ruby completed the reimbursement forms and has modified them as necessary as the program has developed. Currently, Ruby indicated that she has processed approximately 15 reimbursement packages that totaled \$3434.04. The total amount is lower than anticipated, but she thinks that with continuing marketing efforts the amount of money reimbursed will increase. Ruby is documenting questions and tracking decisions made by the department on issues in anticipation there may be the need to propose rule changes. Jim stated that if the council members have any ideas regarding possible ways to allocate the money within the constraints of the Environmental Protection Agency approved work plan and/or marketing ideas that the program would be happy to consider them.

Lee questioned the requirement that in order for an operator to qualify for reimbursement for a system that they must be employed by a community or non-transient non-community

(NTNC) water system serving less than 3,300 people. The work plan currently states that a qualified applicant must be "working for a community or NTNC water system serving less than 3,300 people". This issue will be reviewed to determine if this section of the work plan could be modified, if needed. This will be discussed further at the next council meeting.

Demonstration of
Wastewater Exam

Reta provided instructions on how to administer a wastewater exam. She provided copies of the Instructions for Administering ABC Examinations in Montana, Exam Administrator Report, Question Comment Form, copy of the first page of an exam that indicates the test series numbers needed for the scan sheet, and a copy of the scan sheet. Reta briefly discussed what information is required on the scan sheet and where the information can be located. The council appreciated the refresher and thanked her for the demonstration.

BUDGET REPORT

Jim discussed a water and wastewater fee projection handout produced by Ruby. It shows a gradual decline in available balance based on the anticipated revenue and the spending authority requested by the legislature. At the rate of the decline, the department will be looking at a possible renewal fee increase in approximately 2 years. This was a general discussion and required no action from the committee. At the next council meeting, the Operator Certification program will have proposed fee increase comparisons to discuss in more depth with the council.

Renewal Update

Ashley reported that 1,545 renewal invoices were mailed out on April 5, 2002 and that \$58,425.00 had been received. Ashley provided a handout that showed a total of 84 certificates (33 owed renewal fees, 7 owed continuing educational credits, and 44 owed both) were revoked as of September 6, 2002.

Compliance Status Report

Reta handed out copies of the October 2002 Compliance Status Report showing a compliance rate of 98% for community, 97% for NTNC, and 95% for wastewater systems. Reta stated that Jenny revised the form to reduce the size and to track the non-compliant systems only. Reta and Jenny are working to determine all of the water bottlers and water haulers that are classified as community and NTNC in an effort to get a more accurate count of compliant verses non-compliant systems. Bill mentioned the continual issue regarding the states authority for tribal communities and the requirement for certified operators. Jim stated that this will continue to be an issue and that things may change significantly in the next few years.

Enforcement

Jim addressed the issue regarding the operator in Billings that was sent to the Enforcement Division January 2002. The action was given back to the Public Water Supply Section and additional investigation was undertaken. It was determined that a breach in the operator duties occurred, but it appears that the errors have been corrected. Jim believes that the past practices were serious enough that the department will still proceed with a reprimand.

Jim discussed an operator that was responsible for approximately 50 systems and was "in flight of the law" for period of time. The operator would have potentially been in violation of the rules (17.40.208 Administrative Rules of Montana). The rules state that "every water and wastewater treatment system must have an individual in responsible charge at the system site or on call at all times who can respond in a timely manner to threats to public or environmental health". Jim also mentioned that this operator apparently took money from approximately 30 systems and was supposed to complete their annual Consumer Confidence Reports (CCRs). The operator failed to provide this service, which resulted in several systems receiving violations from the department for not fulfilling this requirement. Jim requested the council provided their input on the potential action the department takes regarding the operator's performance. After some discussion, Lee made a motion to recommend the operator's license be revoked and Bob seconded. All of the remaining council members agreed, except for Jim who decided to abstain from the vote.

Proposed Rule Change

The proposed rule change was published and took effect November 19, 2002. Jim addressed the following rule reminders: the new CEC date will change and all CEC report forms must be received by the department by June 15 of each even-numbered year; the wastewater classification levels have changed to include advanced and tertiary wastewater treatment; and the level 5 classification will now require operators to have 3 months experience before they can be considered fully certified.

Lee requested clarification regarding his classification change for the system located in Bigfork. Bill presented an example of East Helena and how they will change from a 3C classification to a level 1C. The Operator Certification program will ensure that all of the wastewater systems that are affected by the new rules are notified. A summary of systems requiring operator upgrades and actions taken will be discussed at the next council meeting.

LEGISLATURE ISSUES	Jim mentioned that the legislature requested that the departments consider eliminating some of the council meetings each year to save money. Jim presented the option to the council to consider having only two meetings a year, approximately 6 months apart. The council members agreed. It was discussed that if it was needed that a telephonic conference could be arranged.
DATE OF NEXT MEETING	It was determined that there will be no February meeting. The next meeting will be May 22, 2003 in Helena.
ADJOURNMENT	Carol made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:12 and Joni seconded. The motion to adjourn was unanimous.